**Racial Justice Sunday**

**Poetry**

**We Remember**

*by Emili JoLynn*

*CMEAC Bicentennial Emancipation Celebration*

We remember the heartache, suffering, and pain

We remember the agony, and strain

We remember those separated from their homes

We remember those with broken dreams and bones

We remember people alienated from their and culture

To a land where they experienced brutal torture

We remember the tears that were shed

We remember all the blood that was bled

We remember the struggle to survive

We remember the fight to stay alive

We remember all those lost at sea

We remember all those sold in to slavery

We remember how families fought to stay one

Separated mother from daughter and father from son

We remember all of the cruel names

The word nigger is scribed in our brain

We remember the abuse and the rape

We remember all of the deaths that could’ve been saved

We remember a time of injustice and prejudice

When people of colour were killed due to selfishness

We remember the abolitionists who fought to make a change

We remember those who made our lives a better way

We remember those who made straight the streets

So we could live free and with less racial grief

We remember that although the battle has been won

We remember the war is still going strong

We remember racism lives on

We remember the hate crimes each and every one

We remember, acknowledge, praise, and honour

Those who walked in bravery, truth, and power

We remember with every step we take

How long it took just to get to this place

We remember not with pride or fingers to shake

We remember so we don’t make the same mistakes

We remember that perfection lies in the life to come

When we stand in God’s presence and see His Son

**‘I Can’t Breathe’**

*by Oyin Oladipo*

*written in memory of George Floyd*

Strip me of this accursed Black skin, I want to live in peace!

I watched this video with emotions I can’t describe.

But, American why? England, why?

I watched this fully aware that I am Black, living in a White world.

I am Black, in a white college.

I am Black, in a white country.

I am Black – and to many I am wrong!

*For this, I cannot breathe.*

For how long will this injustice prevail?

Slavery, oppression, repression, murder… genocide.

Does God ever curse the oppressors of His people?

Or, does He simply look away?

If this is the God of the Exodus, isn’t it time he drowns Pharaoh?

*Isn’t it time he destroys Pharaoh’s army of brutal oppressors?*

*If only for a moment, to allow me to take the breath of life.*

But, nay – this white-washed, blue-eyed Jesus

*appears to* side with the oppressors – He is the oppressor!

*They have changed the hew of his skin,*

*changed His hair, changed the colour of eyes.*

*He belongs to them, and they are His oppressors.*

*How can I believe, when I cannot breathe.*

I cry at the death of my people.

I weep *beneath* the weight of the hopelessness

of being brown, labelled black, *somehow* – being born wrong.

Strip me please,

strip this accursed melanin off me;

for a chance to live in peace,

I’ll *willingly* shed this skin,

*for a chance to breathe.*

But, I can’t breathe,

my life like a wobbly, fluttering flame is snuffed out.

I have no power, I cannot breathe;

I die daily at the hands of those who hold the guns,

who hold the power, hold the wealth, *who* hold the Bible.

I cannot breathe, because I’m Black,

this White man’s knee remains *ever* *constant* on my neck,

*blocking* my airways, *stifling my screams*, *ignoring my pleas*,

I cannot breathe.

I cannot breathe, I cannot breathe.

*God of my ancestors* – where are you?

God of the heavens where are you?

As for this blue-eyed Jesus,

He and his comrades, they are silent,

And, their eyes have looked away.

I c a n n o t b r e a t h e

***‘***[**Equality**](http://www.poetseers.org/contemporary-poets/maya-angelou-poems/equality/index.html)***’***

*by Maya Angelou*

Take the blinders from your vision,  
take the padding from your ears,  
and confess you’ve heard me crying,  
and admit you’ve seen my tears.

Hear the tempo so compelling,  
hear the blood throb in my veins.  
Yes, my drums are beating nightly,  
and the rhythms never change.

**Equality, and I will be free.  
Equality, and I will be free.**

You announce my ways are wanton,

that I fly from man to man,

but if I'm just a shadow to you,

could you ever understand?

We have lived a painful history,

we know the shameful past,

but I keep on marching forward,

and you keep on coming last.

**Equality, and I will be free.**

**Equality, and I will be free.**

Take the blinders from your vision,

take the padding from your ears,

and confess you've heard me crying,

and admit you've seen my tears.

Hear the tempo so compelling,

hear the blood throb in my veins.

Yes, my drums are beating nightly,

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**Equality, and I will be free.**

**Equality, and I will be free.**

# **Caged Bird[[1]](#footnote-1)**

by [Maya Angelou](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/maya-angelou)

A free bird leaps

on the back of the wind

and floats downstream

till the current ends

and dips his wing

in the orange sun rays

and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks

down his narrow cage

can seldom see through

his bars of rage

his wings are clipped and

his feet are tied

so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings

with a fearful trill

of things unknown

but longed for still

and his tune is heard

on the distant hill

for the caged bird

sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze

and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees

and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn

and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams

his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream

his wings are clipped and his feet are tied

so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings

with a fearful trill

of things unknown

but longed for still

and his tune is heard

on the distant hill

for the caged bird

sings of freedom.

**The Present Crisis**

*Written by James Russell Lowell, 1819-1892*

*Public Domain*

(Best read as an Christian ode for race equality within the context of slavery.)

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| When a deed is done for Freedom,  through the broad earth's aching breast  Runs a thrill of joy prophetic,  trembling on from east to west,          And the slave, where'er he cowers,  feels the soul within him climb  To the awful verge of manhood,  as the energy sublime         Of a century bursts full-blossomed  on the thorny stem of Time.  Through the walls of hut and palace  Shoots the instantaneous throe, When the travail of the Ages  wrings earth's systems to and fro;       At the birth of each new Era,  with a recognizing start,          Nation wildly looks at nation,  standing with mute lips apart,            And glad Truth's yet mightier man-child  leaps beneath the Future's heart.  So the Evil's triumph sendeth,  with a terror and a chill,         Under continent to continent,  the sense of coming ill,           And the slave, where'er he cowers,  feels his sympathies with God   In hot tear-drops ebbing earthward,  to be drunk up by the sod,         Till a corpse crawls round unburied,  delving in the nobler clod.  For mankind are one in spirit,  and an instinct bears along,    Round the earth's electric circle,  the swift flash of right or wrong;   Whether conscious or unconscious,  yet Humanity's vast frame         Through its ocean-sundered fibres  feels the gush of joy or shame;          In the gain or loss of one race  all the rest have equal claim. | Once to every man and nation  comes the moment to decide,            In the strife of Truth with Falsehood,  for the good or evil side;        Some great cause, God's new Messiah,  offering each the bloom or blight,   Parts the goats upon the left hand,  and the sheep upon the right,       And the choice goes by forever 'twixt  that darkness and that light.  Hast thou chosen, O my people,  on whose party thou shalt stand,    Ere the Doom from its worn sandals  shakes the dust against our land?        Though the cause of Evil prosper,  yet 'tis Truth alone is strong,       And, albeit she wander outcast now,  I see around her throng            Troops of beautiful, tall angels,  to enshield her from all wrong.  Backward look across the ages  0xdcand the beacon-moments see,           That, like peaks of some sunk continent,  jut through Oblivion's sea;            Not an ear in court or market  for the low, foreboding cry     Of those Crises, God's stern winnowers,  from whose feet earth's chaff must fly;     Never shows the choice momentous  till the judgment hath passed by.  Careless seems the great Avenger;  history's pages but record           One death-grapple in the darkness  'twixt old systems and the Word;            Truth forever on the scaffold,  Wrong forever on the throne,        Yet that scaffold sways the future,  and, behind the dim unknown,   Standeth God within the shadow,  keeping watch above his own.  ***(More below…)*** |

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| We see dimly in the Present  what is small and what is great,            Slow of faith how weak an arm  may turn the iron helm of fate,        But the soul is still oracular;  amid the market's din,  List the ominous stern whisper from  the Delphic cave within,—      "They enslave their children's children  who make compromise with sin."  Slavery, the earth-born Cyclops,  fellest of the giant brood,   Sons of brutish Force and Darkness,  who have drenched the earth with blood,        Famished in his self-made desert,  blinded by our purer day, Gropes in yet unblasted regions  for his miserable prey;—     Shall we guide his gory fingers  where our helpless children play?  Then to side with Truth is noble  when we share her wretched crust, Ere her cause bring fame and profit,  and 'tis prosperous to be just;   Then it is the brave man chooses,  while the coward stands aside,     Doubting in his abject spirit,  till his Lord is crucified,           And the multitude make virtue  of the faith they had denied.  Count me o'er earth's chosen heroes,  they were souls that stood alone,      While the men they agonized for  hurled the contumelious stone,     Stood serene, and down the future  saw the golden beam incline       To the side of perfect justice,  mastered by their faith divine, By one man's plain truth to manhood  and to God's supreme design.  By the light of burning heretics  Christ's bleeding feet I track,           Toiling up new Calvaries ever with  the cross that turns not back,     And these mounts of anguish  number how each generation learned One new word of that grand Credo  which in prophet-hearts hath burned     Since the first man stood God-conquered  with his face to heaven upturned. | For Humanity sweeps onward:  where to-day the martyr stands,       On the morrow crouches Judas  with the silver in his hands; Far in front the cross stands ready  and the crackling fagots burn,     While the hooting mob of yesterday  in silent awe return       To glean up the scattered ashes  into History's golden urn.  'Tis as easy to be heroes  as to sit the idle slaves         Of a legendary virtue  carved upon our fathers' graves,          Worshippers of light ancestral make  the present light a crime;   Was the Mayflower launched by cowards,  steered by men behind their time?         Turn those tracks toward Past or Future,  that made Plymouth Rock sublime?    They were men of present valor,  stalwart old iconoclasts,     Unconvinced by axe or gibbet  that all virtue was the Past's; But we make their truth our falsehood,  thinking that hath made us free,      Hoarding it in mouldy parchments,  while our tender spirits flee       The rude grasp of that great Impulse  which drove them across the sea.  They have rights who dare maintain them;  we are traitors to our sires,         Smothering in their holy ashes  Freedom's new-lit altar-fires;            Shall we make their creed our jailer?  Shall we, in our haste to slay, From the tombs of the old prophets  steal the funeral lamps away     To light up the martyr-fagots  round the prophets of to-day?  New occasions teach new duties;  Time makes ancient good uncouth;          They must upward still, and onward,  who would keep abreast of Truth;      Lo, before us gleam her camp-fires!  we ourselves must Pilgrims be,            Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly  through the desperate winter sea,  Nor attempt the Future's portal  with the Past's blood-rusted key.  ### |

**Racial Justice Sunday**

**Additional Poetry Resources**

**The Story of the King**

*Written and performed by Paul Syrstad*

*published 1 January 2021*

The short film clip and poem have been nominated by the Step Forward for the UK Christian Chart in the category of Poetry/Spoken word. It can be downloaded from Youtube:

<https://youtu.be/_xq3Xbj2BMY>

**The Poetry Foundation**

*Poetry and Racial Justice and Equality*

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/155298/poetry-and-racial-justice-and-equality>

**The Hive Life**

*Asia-Pacific Co-working Network*

<https://hivelife.com/powerful-poems-injustice-racial-discrimination/>

**Each Other, UK**

*Fighting Prejudice with Poetry*

<https://eachother.org.uk/fighting-prejudice-poetry/>

1. Maya Angelou, “Caged Bird” from Shaker, Why Don't You Sing? Copyright © 1983 by Maya Angelou. Used by permission of Random House, an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)